DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 600 EC 302 040

TITLE	Call for Violence Prevention and Intervention on Behalf of Very Young Children.
INSTITUTION	Zero to Three/National Center for Clinical Infant Programs, Arlington, VA.
SPONS AGENCY	Ford Foundation, New York, N.Y.; Prudential Foundation, Newark, N.J.
PUB DATE	[93]
NOTE	9p.; Funding also provided by the Philip and Lynn Straus Foundation.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Change Strategies; Child Abuse; Child Welfare; Emotional Response; Family Violence; *Intervention; Policy Formation; *Prevention; Public Policy; *Social Problems; Values; Victims of Crime; *Violence; Young Children

ABSTRACT

The Study Group on Violence is recommending the implementation of several initial steps that can begin to alleviate the repercussions of pervasive violence in U.S. homes, individual communities and society as a whole. When the Study Group began examining the impact of violence on very young children, their families and practitioners, it realized from the outset that there are no simple solutions to the complex issues surrounding violence. The paper notes that family violence, community violence, and societal violence are all on a similar continuum, have an impact on each other, and frequently affect the same individuals. It notes the continual barrage of violence in the community and the media, and the desensitization that results. The paper then calls for a multisector approach to the problem of violence, with a three-point agenda: (1) a family-centered approach to addressing trauma/prevention; (2) a realignment of values to provide incentives that support nonviolent choices; and (3) informed comprehensive public policy strategies for reducing violence. The paper emphasizes that the entire society, from the individual, to the family, to the government and institutions, must lend a hand in providing assistance. (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED356600

Call For Violence Prevention and Intervention On Behalf of Very Young Children

Issued by

The Violence Study Group

ZERO TO THREE/National Center for Clinical Infant Programs

If it takes a whole village to raise a child,
"It also takes a village, a town, a state and a nation
to protect that child from the lasting trauma
associated with the experience of violence."

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Emily Fenichel
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

National Center for Clinical Infant Programs
2000 14th St. North, Arlington, Va. 22201 (703) 528-4300

EC 302040

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Call For Violence Prevention and Intervention On Behalf of Very Young Children

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Introduction	1
Approaching the Problem: Our Findings	1
Call for a Multi-Sector Approach	2
• *Family Centered Approach to Addressing Trauma/Prevention*	3
• *Realignment of Values*	4
• *Informed Comprehensive Public Policy Strategies for Reducing Violence*	5
Summary	6

Study of *The Impact of Community Violence on Infants, Toddlers and their Families* is funded by grants from Ford Foundation, Prudential Foundation, and Philip and Lynn Straus Foundation.

Introduction

The Study Group on Violence formed by **ZERO TO THREE**/National Center for Clinical Infant Programs is recommending the implementation of several initial steps that can begin to alleviate the repercussions of pervasive violence in our nation's homes, individual communities and our society as a whole. Implementation of our recommendations will require broad involvement from our society -- the public and private sectors, institutions individuals and families. Such a broad approach is necessary for the implementation of our initial steps for a simple reason: Violence has become deeply embedded in almost all areas of our society.

It is important to note that when our Study Group began examining the impact of violence on very young children, their families and practitioners over one year ago, we realized from the outset that there are no simple solutions to the complex issues surrounding violence. **However, we believe that the steps we are recommending -- if implemented -- will accomplish two important things: help the young victims of violence overcome the horrible effects of the violence itself; and provide support for those who are helping the victims.**

Our exploration of the problem of violence initially began as a result of a plenary session at our 1991 National Training Institute. It was here that the effects of violence on very young children, their parents and practitioners were brought into sharp focus. We found that children in communities across the country are being traumatized by random acts of violence; the traditional shelters -- home, school, child care -- are no longer safe havens. As a result, our Study Group began collecting and studying research and information on violence and young children. At the same time, we began consulting with violence experts from the fields of law enforcement, mental health, medicine and social science agencies. We then held a public symposium in December 1992 to garner additional views and concerns.

Approaching the Problem: Our Findings

The Study Group has learned that violence in its various forms cannot be disentangled; one kind of violence cannot be reduced without addressing others. Family violence as exhibited in child and spouse abuse is not a different form of violence from the violence experienced throughout the society. Family violence, community violence and societal violence are all on a similar continuum. They have an impact on each other and frequently affect the same individuals. The attitudes that tolerate and ignore violence in the society as a whole also tolerate the violence acted out in individual communities and homes throughout the country.

Dr. James Garbarino one of the early speakers in our public Symposium, provided a model for addressing the problem:

For the first time we are beginning to see the experience of violence and young children as part of a social phenomenon. I would liken this to what has happened over the last 40 years in our understanding of injuries to children in automobiles. For a long period of time we understood injuries to young children in automobiles as being part of random accidents, senseless events that were accidental, not part of anything systematic.

Only when we began to see these events in the lives of children as part of systematic phenomena that had to do with the structure, the technology of cars, the regulations of the use of automobiles, the systematic role of alcohol, only when we began to see it as a social phenomenon did we have the capacity to move on it as a matter of social policy ... We are beginning to see that the daily reports of murders and shootings and stabbing and killings are not simply senseless random acts, but a part of a cultural and social phenomenon within our society.

We believe that the cultural and social phenomenon of violence cannot be addressed in the traditional single focus, categorical tradition of problem solving that we have used in the past. Reducing the number of children killed in automobile accidents has not been achieved through applied research in a single area of inquiry; instead, research in many sciences ranging from aerodynamics, medicine, engineering and the social sciences has been applied to the problem.

Research on how to prevent auto accident deaths did not stand alone; strong advocates using this new knowledge worked arduously with automobile manufacturers, the media, law enforcement and the courts to change behavior and priorities in decision making. We now have shoulder harness seat belts in front and rear seats, stronger laws and penalties for persons driving under the influence of alcohol, programs sponsored by the beer industry to reduce excessive drinking, media stars warning against drinking and driving, car seats for infants and toddlers, car seat loan programs sponsored by hospitals and local governments, and commercials educating about the importance of car seats for children.

Although many children continue to die as a result of auto accidents, recent trends have shown a marked decline in deaths of very young children due to auto accidents. There is still much work to be done toward changing attitudes and behavior about drinking and driving, and about using car seats and seat belts. However, the humorous drunks and drunken drivers weaving through the streets have all but disappeared from our television and movie screens. Tolerance for this dangerous behavior has disappeared.

Call for a Multi-Sector Approach

ZERO TO THREE issues a call for a similar multi-sector approach to the problem of violence that surrounds us. From experts we learned that:

1. Very young children exposed to violence can be traumatized with a form of Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) and this trauma can have an impact on their ability to form relationships, the way they relate to others, their tolerance for violence as they grow to adulthood and their ability to learn new information.

2. Many children in the United States are continually exposed to actual violence or images of violence that increasingly desensitizes them to violence against others and teaches them to resolve conflict in a violent manner. They often feel that threatening violence is the only way they can be safe.

3. Parents feel powerless against the continual barrage of violence in the community, media and society in general. Violence is not only tolerated in our society, it is welcomed as entertainment.

4. All of the traditional protectors of children, parents, child care workers, teachers, and others, feel that they cannot protect children from either the real violence or the images of violence in their environment.

As clinicians and practitioners from a range of disciplines who work directly with children and families, we believe that there are areas where we can have a direct impact on the problem. However, we know that we cannot do it without support from other disciplines and sectors of society.

That is why **ZERO TO THREE** will call on political leaders, legislators, the media, law enforcement, and others in our disciplines to serve as advocates and help us pursue the following three-point agenda:

1. a family centered approach to addressing trauma/prevention;

2. a realignment of values; and

3. informed comprehensive public policy strategies for reducing violence.

Following is a synopsis of each of the above agenda items.

Family Centered Approach to Addressing Trauma/Prevention

We recognize that parents need help in coping with the violence around them; they need information about what to tell their children about violence; they need skills in non-violent problem/conflict resolution.

Children exposed to violence need healing for the trauma they have experienced. Very young children exposed to violence represent a special group because they are less able

to talk about their violent experiences, more apt to experience overwhelming loss, and more likely to react globally to a fearful experience, even if they fail to "remember" it in adulthood. Children of all ages need skills in non-violent problem resolution and, above all, a hope for a future without violence.

Practitioners who work with children like child care workers, pediatric trauma nurses, school nurses and counselors have also been traumatized by the increasing numbers of children affected by violence and the violence around them.

As clinicians we can begin applying current knowledge on addressing post traumatic and chronic traumatic stress for children and families. We can develop materials that will help parents and practitioners acquire skills in these areas. We can also provide training materials to sensitize social service and law enforcement workers to the needs of families impacted by violence.

Our first step in this endeavor will be to prepare a document for parents and caregivers that examines violence from the perspective of very young children. This document will include an easy to understand interpretation of recent research in addressing trauma and developing resilience and conflict resolution skills designed for parents and others who work directly with children and families.

Realignment of Values

There are many things that clinicians cannot do alone. There is a need in society for a realignment of values concerning violence. Violence and violent acts are viewed as entertainment. When our awareness was raised about the consequences of drunk driving, our society ceased to tolerate or be entertained by the "funny" drunk driver weaving through traffic. When most people began to see smoking as antisocial behavior, the numbers of adult smokers began to decline. There needs to be a campaign against violence as strong as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), or the public health campaign against smoking to change attitudes and values about violence.

Violence is not a big city problem; drive-by shootings occur in towns with populations of only 16,000. Gang violence occurs in towns with upwards of 20,000 residents, affecting people in states not traditionally associated with violence -- states such as Kansas, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana. Our society has been able to tolerate growing trends in violence with little outcry. For example --

- In 1991, 1,383 young children died (half of them under age one) from abuse and other intentional injuries in 1991.

- Guns killed 222 children under age 10 in 1990 in the United States. During the same year, only 68 people *of all ages* were killed by handguns in Canada.

As we re-evaluate our tolerance for violence we should call on ourselves and others to examine our responsibility for violence. Each person who commits a violent act is ultimately responsible for that act. The choice between violence and non-violence must be examined. What are the policies that support the choice of non-violence? Are there policies that provide incentives that support a choice of non-violence? What are the rewards in society for selecting non-violent options?

Prevailing attitudes and policies support investment in disincentives to violence. Disincentives like arrest, incarceration, etc. are expensive. There should be more investment in preventing violence. More money is invested on the federal, state and local levels in building and expanding prisons than building and expanding safe, clean and affordable housing. Can we as a nation balance our expenditures on disincentives with our investments in prevention?

In large and small communities around the country, families have begun small scale campaigns against violence. Parent and victim organizations need to come together, bringing with them their current concerns about gun laws, drug laws, etc. and confront societal attitudes about violence. Issues related to incentives for choosing a non-violent lifestyle and personal responsibility for actions need to be a part of the agenda, along with the task of changing attitudes and behavior.

We call upon our political leadership to bring these groups together with media leaders and launch a campaign to change our national attitudes toward violence and our tolerance of violent behavior.

Informed Comprehensive Public Policy Strategies for Reducing Violence

Finally, we call upon legislators on all levels of government to begin to develop a rational approach to addressing the impact of violence in our society.

National policy should do several things --

- First, it should address the crippling problem related to indiscriminate gun purchases -- ensure that parents understand their responsibility in gun ownership and keep handguns and other weapons out of the hands of children.

- National policy should refine the existing fragmented services into a more goal directed set of violence prevention and follow-up services that will include very young children and family-centered mental health strategies. Some models include:

    - Hawaii's Healthy Start Program that provides visits to all families of newborns and identifies and provides prevention services, emotional support,

family crisis resolution strategies and mental health services to at-risk families. On the mainland, The National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Ronald McDonald Children's Charities are trying to replicate this in states around the country.

- In Boston, Mass., New Haven, Conn., and Washington, D.C., there are university-affiliated projects that provide resources and coordinate the work of child and family services and mental health professionals to intervene in cases where a violent crime involves a child either as victim or witness. These services are coordinated with law enforcement and special police training programs to provide community-based help and follow-up toward the reduction of the effects of long-term trauma (PTSD) on these children. Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) recently introduced legislation to broaden this type of program through a Child and Family Services and Law Enforcement Partnership.

- National policy should address the amount of violence children can watch on television and in the movies. (According to *TV Guide*, a violent incident occurs every six minutes on American television.)

Toward this strategy, **ZERO TO THREE** would be willing to co-sponsor and plan a meeting of concerned legislators, leaders of professional organizations, associations and research bodies across disciplinary lines to develop consensus on a range of strategies that would promote attitude and behavior change toward violence prevention.

Summary

There is an African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." Based on that premise, our Study Group believes, "It also takes a village, a town, a state and a nation to protect that child from the lasting trauma associated with the experience of violence."

As we have stated earlier, when we began examining the impact of violence on very young children, their families and practitioners over one year ago, we realized from the outset that there are no simple solutions to the complex issues surrounding violence. **However, we strongly restate our belief that we can -- and must -- help the young victims of violence in America and help the parents, practitioners and others who are assisting the victims in overcoming the effects of this violence.**

Finally, we must re-emphasize that our entire society, from the individual, to the family, to our government and institutions, must lend a hand in providing this assistance. Violence is so deeply embedded in our society that we cannot begin to heal the wounds inflicted by violence on young children unless we take a comprehensive approach to implementing these recommendations.